

# **Exploring the Inner and Outer Cultural Landscapes of Counseling Candidates towards Diverse Students and Families through Self-Reflection**

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## **Abstract**

*This article presents an interpersonal methodology designed to increase the cultural awareness of counselor candidates. This methodology was implemented through a sequence of activities, which was part of a multicultural course in the counseling credential program in a university located in Southern California. The goal was to enrich future counselor practices by promoting self-reflection processes of personal cultural beliefs. The responses of counselor candidates, gathered through two surveys, suggest that understanding their identities will ease the process of creating bridges between them and the cultural richness of students and their parents.*

**Keywords:** *interpersonal methodology; cultural awareness; counseling practices; self-reflection*

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## Introduction

Counselor candidates must be trained in a way that allows them to not only recognize the effect their attitudes toward racial and ethnic diversity have on students' educational trajectories, but also allows them to understand diverse populations from their own cultural standpoints (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant 2007). The guiding premise, detailed in this study, reflects an interpersonal awareness framework, which encourages school counseling candidates to engage in a personal introspective journey. Schools have a wide range of diversity: race, gender, sexual orientation, culture, religion, etc.; by using this interpersonal awareness framework, counselor candidates can be led to a more coherent understanding of cultural differences. In this article, we explain how this methodology prepared candidates to engage in work with diverse populations through an increased awareness. Further, an *inner* personal journey of cultural awareness of how their cultural experiences have shaped their *outer* cultural perceptions of other groups is explored. Understanding the trajectories of diverse groups in the United States is a high priority for prospective school counselors; cultural awareness can move school counselors to a more objective and centered position where they can guide students of diverse backgrounds with a strong sense of cultural responsibility.

### A View of School Counseling

School counseling in the United States began to take place in the early 1900s in the form of vocational guidance. Guidance pioneers, such as Jesse B. Davis, David S. Hill, Anna Y. Reed, and Eli W. Weaver, developed guidance programs based on different premises, such as job preparedness, character development, and good citizenship (Rockwell & Rothney, 1961). In fact, the transition into a more industrialized nation led educators at the time to prepare students with the knowledge and skills to meet the employment demands of this era; hence, the emergence of vocational guidance in schools. During the 1920s and 1930s, at the onset of guidance counseling, these services were provided by teachers who were appointed to function as vocational counselors while maintaining their teaching responsibilities (Gysbers, 2004). In the 1960s, the numbers of school counselors in schools increased and it was noted that these positions required specialized skills. The particular training school counselors received emphasized the importance of building healthy working relationships that would allow students to increase their decision-making and autonomy. The counseling profession is now framed by the counseling standards of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and its National Model. School counseling programs in k-12 settings following the ASCA National Model aim to ensure equity and access for all students. This is the same case for Professional School Counseling training programs which based their instruction and capacity building on the academic, personal/social and career domains, as well as other core themes such as leadership, advocacy, collaboration, social agency and systemic change.

The challenge that the Industrial Revolution had on vocational guidance counselors in the early years of school based counseling is similar to the cultural transformation of schools in the k-12 educational system. It calls for current school counselor preparation programs to provide candidates with the training to develop effective cross-cultural practices to meet the rising needs of multicultural communities represented in schools (Cheung & Leung, 2008). Effective cross-cultural practices reflect the ability for a school counselor to (a) "know and be able establish relationships with individuals in all cultural groups" (Westbrook & Sedlacek, 1991, p. 21), (b) be

able to “conceptualize clients’ concerns from their perspective or worldview” (Ibrahim, 1991, p. 14), and (c) “provide proactive programming that is culturally sensitive” (Stephens & Lindsey, 2011, p. 45). In fact, the literature (Elizalde-Utnick, 2010; Malott, 2010; Portal, Suck, & Hinkle, 2010) describes effective multicultural practices as appropriate counseling interventions formulated within the context of students’ and families’ cultural needs. Essentially, a school counselor must possess awareness, skills, and knowledge to work with underrepresented populations.

What does this suggest? Considering the current cultural challenges facing students, faculty, staff, and administrations in schools, school counselor preparation programs must look at enriching traditional practices to help candidates develop comprehensive multicultural counseling services (Lee, 2007; Pedersen & Carey, 2002; Sue & Sue, 2008; Ponterotto, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2009). The dichotomy between traditional training, which assumes that counselors are prepared to work with students and parents of any background regardless of race, ethnicity or culture, and the reality of current practices of “equal applicability”, is being questioned by a multicultural wave of communities looking for a collectivistic social connection (Hunter & Sawyer, 2006). It is clear that diverse populations hold divergent cultural views that differ from those practiced by mainstream society. Importantly, cultural worldviews become the roadmap that diverse populations follow in order to establish short- and long-term goals; this is the way they make sense of their relationship with the world. According to Katz (1985), worldviews are a result of a person’s sociocultural upbringing. Moreover, Koltko-Rivera (2004) states, “a worldview (or ‘world view’) is set of assumptions about physical and social reality that may have powerful effects on cognition and behavior” (p. 3). In other words, worldviews encompass personal attitudes, values, opinions, and perceptions; these powerfully impact cognitive processes, decision-making, and behaviors. Because of the changing diverse demographics in our schools it is important for school counseling candidates to identify the impact their cultural beliefs will have on the way they work and communicate with students; thus the need for multicultural training in the process of transforming attitudes of candidates to include awareness of and appreciation for diversity (Steele, 2008).

### **Culture, Race, and Language: Multidimensional Counseling**

A sequence of activities was designed to help candidates unpack their socio-cultural perceptions of other groups led candidates to break their personal cultural codifications. These codifications can take place in the form of learned views, assumptions, and opinions adopted in ones upbringing or acquired from unsuccessful experiences with diverse groups. This scaffold process allowed them to discover and question individual reactions and perceptions that shape their educational views (Lindsey, Robbins, & Terrell, 2003).

Traditional training in the counseling profession is a product of European American culture, led by European theorists such as Freud, Jung, Adler, and Perls, as well as Americans of European descent such as Rogers, Skinner, and Ellis (Lee, 1999). Consequently, the orientation of traditional counselors mirrors a culturally universal etic perspective where the practices of good counseling are considered to fit all cultures. This concept excludes the culturally specific emic. Emic as defined by Sue and Sue (2003) refers to a “cultural context of existing beliefs, values, rules, and practices” (p. 7). This perspective considers the significant role lifestyles, cultural values, and worldviews play in working with multicultural students. Fusick and Charkow Bordeau (2004) “underscore the importance of not being ‘color-blind’, as this attitude denies the real impact of the history of racism upon relationships today” (p. 76). They emphasize that adopting a color blindness stand limits the

appreciation of students' cultural undertakings. The literature (Arredondo, 2010; Ober, Granello, & Henfield, 2009; Portman, 2009; Smith & Ng, 2009) reveals that each counseling candidate must be able to look inward in order to understand herself/himself as a cultural being. As counseling students become aware of their cultural essence with its tapestry of experiences and beliefs, they can more effectively and empathically help diverse students rewrite their educational and aspirational narratives.

The building blocks of school counseling preparation programs rest in the nurturing of candidates' *inner* and *outer* awareness. Providing training, in this case, in a multicultural course or by way of other cross-cultural activities, can assist candidates in acquiring valuable personal cultural knowledge that can be applied when they work with diverse students (Dickson, Jepsen, & Barbee, 2008). Studies have focused minimally (Dahir, 2009; Felker & Brown, 1970; Kelli, 2009; Worthington, Soth-Moreno, & Moreno, 2007) on the attitudes of counselor candidates in school preparation programs and the impact of such attitudes on their ability to address the needs of diverse pupils. For instance, research (Sue et al., 1992; Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1998; Sue, 2001; Sue & Sue, 2003) shows a change in the initial multicultural counseling competency components from belief/attitude-knowledge skills to awareness-knowledge skills. Minami (2009) indicates that there are no researchers that have elaborated on the disappearance of the initial attitudinal component. Therefore, it is important to consider candidates' attitudes as a valuable component in the counseling of diverse students and families as it may interfere in the evaluative process of candidates' guidance approach.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this article was grounded in Pedersen's conceptual framework for developing cultural and cross-cultural competence. Pedersen (1994) developed a developmental model that promotes three competencies of multicultural competence for practitioners in the field of education which include awareness, knowledge, and skills. According to Pedersen, the mastery of these domains leads educators to host a more grounded approach to working with diverse groups. Most importantly, each competency builds on the previous work accomplished in each domain. The awareness competency requires the acknowledgment of one's own biases as well as the awareness of sociopolitical issues that youngsters from different cultural backgrounds encounter. The knowledge competency involves the acquisition of factual information about different cultural groups. Lastly, the skills competency becomes a process of integrating the information acquired in both the awareness and knowledge competencies in an effort to positively affect culturally different populations. When educational institutions and their corresponding staffs and learners are culturally competent, the cultural assets students and families bring to the school are validated and they serve as a resource for educators, the students, and their families. The students' funds of knowledge that are oftentimes filtered through biased lenses are valued.

## Research Design

### Course Model

The course model described in this study analyzes best practices with counselor candidates. It examines diversity in school settings from a culturally universal perspective to a culturally specific framework that recognizes the presence of culture-specific assets when working with diverse youth.

Furthermore, the impact of the idea of “good counseling is good counseling” is explored (Sue & Sue, 2003). The premise of “good counseling” follows traditional practices where Western concepts of behavior are considered common and evenly applicable to all cultures. A culture-specific framework follows an asset-based focus that uses the strengths of diverse students to provide services that meet their unique aspirational trajectories. The authors posit that it is important for current and prospective counselors to consider the funds of knowledge diverse students’ and families’ posses, as this will enhance their level of understanding and guidance approach.

The diversity class, where the model was piloted, is taught in a graduate level school counselor preparation program which seeks to prepare multicultural competent counselors who are able to embrace the unique qualities of diverse students and parents (Fowers & Davidov, 2006). A core component of the curriculum is the concept of self-examination. It is important in the development of multicultural competent counselors as they serve as catalysts to students and families through appearance, language, and other factors that accentuate differences. The purpose of developing an interpersonal model in a diversity course is to prepare prospective counselor practitioners who understand that schools have the ability to cultivate either a culture of multiculturalism that values acceptance and appreciates the cultural assets of their respective communities or a culture and environment that breeds cultural and social inequities. Gibson, Gandara, and Koyama (2004) explain that “young people’s sense of themselves as students is often formed and confirmed by the spaces they occupy on a school campus, and these spaces may promote or impede their educational progress” (p. 9). School counselors have been identified as key stakeholders in the academic, personal/social, and career trajectories of all students. They are valuable in this transformation stage of students as they are trained in rapport building, understanding differences, conflict resolution, and goal setting, among other things.

## **Data Collection**

To evaluate the usefulness of the class as well as the effectiveness of the model, we collected qualitative data in a multi-step process: weekly reading reflections, class discussions, assignments, and a questionnaire to elicit candidates’ points of insight relevant to the study (Winsdale & Wonk, 2007). All data components were part of the course routine, except for the survey. Thirty-six counseling candidates enrolled in their second year in the school counseling preparation program participated in the study. The ages of these students ranged from 25 to 60 years old. The majority of these candidates were female (88.5%), 11.5% were male, and the demographics of the candidates mirrored those of the Southern California Region. They responded to pre and post surveys, which were respectively administered at the beginning and the end of the semester. To measure the *inner* and *outer* attitude shift in candidates, two additional questions were added to the post survey questions. The first set of questions in the pre survey allowed participants to look at themselves and the circumstances of their cultural life stories in relationship to working with diverse student groups. The post survey included two additional questions to evaluate the growth of the candidates’ cultural awareness.

## **Data Analysis**

Responses were analyzed to ascertain the following: (a) candidates’ initial views on multiculturalism as well as their understanding of their impact as practitioners; (b) learning and unlearning processes on multiculturalism; and, (c) cultural consciousness developed by candidates to enrich their counseling practices. The analysis of the responses involved a process where the

faculty quantified the participants' responses, looking for significant patterns and themes, which marked the trainees' attitude shifts as they develop into skilled counselors.

The common themes identified by the researchers from the data are highlighted in each of the following sections: Understanding the 'T' to Counsel, Contextualizing the 'T' within Society, and Developing Effective Inclusive Counseling Practices. Although all 36 participant counselor candidates experienced positive personal growth as a result of the sequence of activities in the course, there were patterns and themes that emerged at significant levels in three areas. The themes identified under each of the categories include valuing one's cultural heritage, valuing one's cultural assets, and the integration of culturally germane information into the counseling process.

**Understanding the 'T' to counsel.** Berger and Kaye (2009) explain that having the capacity to counsel others begins by gaining deep understanding of one's self, one's community, and society as a whole. Of 36 participants, 14 (approximately 40%) specifically wrote about a deepening awareness of and appreciation for the unique cultural heritage that they brought to the counseling process.

**Contextualizing the 'T' within society.** Neville and Mobley (2001) explain how the social environment influences human behavior in a setting where multicultural counseling practices take place. Following the conceptualization of the self, 13 of the 36 participants (approximately 36%) wrote about the impact their cultural assets had in their working relationships with diverse student populations.

**Developing effective inclusive counseling practices.** The culminating process in the course sought to encourage candidates to engage in unpacking one more indispensable layer in the counseling process: a dimension in the therapeutic course of action which seeks to develop effective comprehensive counseling practices by looking at the internal and external sociocultural assets of students and parents (Corey, 2009). The most common theme emerged in 30 of the 36 (approximately 80%) of the students' narratives, as they wrote clearly of a more nuanced understanding of the relevance of their cultural roles and the interplay between their roles and the cultures of the students, parents, and communities they will service.

Specific excerpts illustrating the above themes and patterns are included in the body of the article.

### Managing Diversity from Inside Out

Counseling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a multidimensional set of skills. As Topping and McMannus (2002) have asserted, "schools exist within their cultures and times. To act as if we teach [counsel] in a vacuum, unaffected by the rest of society, is shortsighted" (p. 7). Listening carefully to these words, counselors who are committed to the implementation of effective practices must: (a) observe students' and families' cultural, linguistic and social attitudes; (b) contextualize and reflect on these attitudes; (c) assess students with tools that take into account the linguistic and cultural richness students bring to school; and finally (d) analyze the data gathered in the first three stages in order to create effective intervention programs.

To achieve this competence, the focus of the diversity course is on the candidates and an ongoing examination of their attitudes, feelings and thoughts. Identifying their "cultural biases" is the bridge leading to an "inner" and "outer" evaluation of cultural principles that will guide their counseling. Cultural biases are described as a process of intentionally or unintentionally ignoring existing differences between cultures, and imposing one's culture based on the values of one

culture to other cultures (Ridley, 2005). There are two salient types of bias: ethnocentrism is illustrated by one's perception that his/her cultural group is superior, and eurocentrism emphasizes a universal view of human behavior (Ridley, 2005). Biases can take place via transference and countertransference as these two processes remain present in professionals who may have unresolved issues or conflicts, and unresolved issues may be easily displaced and acted out to the detriment of students (Hays, 2008). An important factor of the course is to process as a group the personal views of candidates in a safe environment (Corey, 1995). These conditions allow candidates to practice core-counseling skills such as genuineness, acceptance, and empathy, which also reinforce the establishment of a welcoming and inviting group process (Geroski & Kraus, 2010). Previous core counseling skill courses in the program scaffold a pedagogical framework that facilitated a culture of trust and safety amongst faculty and candidates that enabled candidates to take risks and be vulnerable as they deepened the exploration of their inner selves.

Candidates engaged in weekly cross-cultural activities designed to reinforce the growth of intercultural awareness (Fernandez-Enguita, 2001). One of the activities is the creation of a "Who Am I?" poem describing one's cultural heritage. Each poem is shared in class to illustrate the candidates' cultural uniqueness (Lopez & Snyder, 2009). Some examples of phrases in the poems include, "I am a father", "I am a woman", "I am tortillas", "I am music", "I am work in progress", "I am two worlds", and "I am an immigrant". The Silent Steps We Take is another exercise that challenges candidates' reactions to living and learning in a diverse socio-cultural environment where the level of sensitivity and acceptance of others differs from their own. Each of the carefully scaffold activities defines the foundation of the course, allowing candidates to reflect upon their own cultural experiences and how these may impact their roles as school counselors.

Multiculturalism transcends personal experience, influencing the candidates' work with students. Therefore, there were three projects that were designed to expose candidates to a deeper level of personal reflection. The first project that candidates complete is a cultural genogram. This assignment leads candidates to gain awareness of intergenerational issues, how these have impacted their lives, and how they can impact their working relationships with students. The genograms also raise each candidate's personal understanding of his or her own family's legacy (Small, 2002).

The second project is to visit the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. This task is intended to help candidates explore how they first became conscious of prejudice and discrimination and the feelings associated with it. The goal is to raise their personal understanding of how everyone experiences prejudice and discrimination, and that it manifests in a variety of ways. Both of these exercises are accompanied by a reflective group discussion and respective presentations so that candidates have the opportunity to deepen and share personal insights from their experiences in each of the activities.

The last project consists of completing 30 hours of fieldwork in a k-12 school site working with culturally diverse students. The purpose of this task is for candidates to select a diverse population with whom they either are interacting presently, or with whom they hope to engage with in the future. The rationale is to encourage candidates to work on moving from a culturally unaware "I", through a "you" relationship, and finally to a more profound "we" interaction, where the candidates gain respect for, knowledge of, and skills in working with diverse populations.

Aside from the weekly activities and projects, candidates complete weekly reflections exploring personal feelings and reactions resulting from class discussions, activities, and reading assignments. The class discussions are meta-cognitive analyses of the required readings and how the theory explained in these readings are connected to their daily practices (i.e., field work hours,

video analysis, cultural explorations) (Griffith & Ruan, 2005).

### **Understanding the 'I' to Counsel**

Berger and Kaye (2009) explain that having the capacity to counsel others begins by gaining a deep understanding of one's self, one's community, and society as a whole. They identify the value in recognizing and evaluating that these three factors help counselors to better understand the perspectives of their students, the students' parents, and the school culture. Counseling that begins with a deconstruction of personal biases ensures that the services provided to parents and students constitute as a learning experience for both counselor and counselee. Learning together, the counselor moves with his/her students from functional practices defined as a mere "transactional exchange" of services to practices that result in a two-fold transformation. First, students and families gain knowledge to successfully navigate the academic system. Secondly, counselors increase their effectiveness because their work is constantly researching for data that contextualizes their actions (Valsiner, 2000).

At the onset of fall semester,—graduate students engaged in a cultural exploration to understand their own socio-cultural trajectories. The class exercises and activities guided candidates to evaluate their cultural views and how these may impact their work with students and parents. The intent of these exercises and activities was to create awareness and transformation without the preconceptions and judgments. The findings report that through class activities, candidates were able to embrace their own culture, moving from an undefined sense of culture to a more culture specific description. For example, Rafaela (a pseudonym), one of the candidates, when explaining the role her culture plays in understanding others, defined herself as "non-American". As the course progressed, she redefined her cultural identity by claiming the richness of her Portuguese background, classifying herself as Portuguese American. The interpersonal nature of the projects and course structure allowed Rafaela to process the cultural worth of her background and its implications in her individual growth as well as her future work with students and parents. Her experience will allow her to empower students to value their cultural roots. Research (Gibson, Gandara, & Koyama, 2007) indicates that adolescence is a critical period where students seek to establish a sense of identity and are vulnerable to the judgment of others. This may be true for ethnic-minority students who often face the adverse reactions of others if they opt to identify with their cultural group.

Valuing ones culture becomes important in the process of discovering one's identity. Thus, having significant others (e.g., counselors, teachers, peers, parents, etc.) can provide students with a support system to affirm their cultural capital (Pedersen & Carey, 2002). The remarks of another candidate, Ronaldo, illustrates this premise as he initially wrote in his responses, "my culture has given me a rich background to be proud of. I have also gained respect for other cultures because I understand that we are different living in a common place" (Ronaldo, personal communication, September 9, 2009). The second time he answered the same question, he stated, "I accept my culture which allows me to respect other cultures. I love to be different and learn of other cultures" (Ronaldo, personal communication, December 20, 2009). Rodriguez (2009) concurs with the candidate's discovery holding ones culture in high esteem can impact the academic, personal/social, and career aspirations of students in the schooling process.

Lee (2007) shares that both candidates and students belong to rich cultural groups that

influence their perceptions, beliefs, feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and goals. She contends that counselors must be aware of these factors and how they shape students' worldviews and possible selves because awareness of one's culture is equally as important as knowing about students' backgrounds. Vacc (2003) states that cultures are not the sole property of diverse groups, for counselors with a clear understanding of students' cultural conditions will easily appreciate their journeys. For this reason, the statements of the following three candidates support the significance of embodying one's cultural heritage. At the beginning of the semester, one student, Marta, explained how her cultural background—Mexican American—taught her to be open-minded and respect other cultures. In our view, the reflections conducted through the semester allowed her to dig deeper into that belief. The weekly reflections consisted of personal reactions, feelings triggered for the candidates, personal perceptions, and questions candidates have about their individual process of exploration. Thus, this process documented Marta's interpersonal growth from an open-minded student to a student who now recognizes her role within society. Also, her response in the post survey indicated that her culture has taught her to work collectively with society.

A second candidate, Beatrice, acknowledged that there were multiple cultural characteristics, which identified her as unique. For instance, she initially defined herself as Mexican and later she mentioned White as part of her background. Lastly, Jordan defined himself at the beginning of the semester through the perceptions of others, saying, "I think people perceive me as coming from a sense of superiority" (Jordan, personal communication, September 9, 2009). Yet, at the end of the semester he wrote, "I am seen as having White privilege". He moved from defining himself through others to defining himself from within, a significant shift. Beatrice and Jordan expanded their internal definition of self as they were challenged in the course to look at the cultural roles they played in schools' socio-cultural environments and how it may between peers, students, and parents.

Each counselor has a unique life experience within his or her sociocultural environment; this becomes a blueprint for his/her interaction with others. More importantly, counselors' worldviews may differ from those of their students. However, counselor candidates must develop an ability to view their students' experiences as an array of endless possibilities to assist them in their development. In order to do this successfully, counselors must first understand their own self, embracing their cultural individuality (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 1997). Andrea's and Daisy's comments portray the meaning of recognizing one's cultural frame of reference in order to achieve a clear definition of self. When answering what culture(s) defines her, Andrea wrote, "Where I was born because I was raised in that culture and I inherited the majority of my values". Later in the semester she wrote, "Hispanic, because I was born in Colombia, but more specifically Colombian defines me". When reflecting about herself at the beginning of the semester, Daisy pictured her Latin culture, saying, "I speak Spanish, I have brown skin and I love Latin food" (Daisy, personal communication, September 9, 2009). At the end of the semester, these traits were better understood when she highlighted the importance of being from Costa Rica. Thus, locating her culture beyond her customs helped her to have a deeper understanding of her own persona.

### **Contextualizing the 'I' within Society**

Counseling is an educational practice configured within a social environment. Neville & Mobley (2001) explain how social environment influences human behaviour in a setting where multicultural counseling practices take place. Therefore, counseling candidates participating in this course, after

having analyze their own “self” and how this is related to the personal selves of others, participated in assignments to locate and contextualize those two—their “I” and the “T” of students and families. The goal of these activities was to foment the concept that the “I” is always in a symbiotic relationship with the “we” (Perru, 2006).

The onset of the course began with candidates looking to understand their role as individuals in counseling others. Following the conceptualization of the self, students transitioned into understanding the impact their unique cultural membership may have in their working associations with diverse students (Hays & Erford, 2010). The comments articulated by candidates in this section highlight an awareness of enriching the cultural assets of their personas, an ability to embrace others’ experiences, an understanding of negative classifications of other groups based on individuals’ upbringing, a willingness to explore beyond first impressions, and an understanding of how cultures affect others.

Acknowledging the value of one’s cultural makeup is significant in the formation of candidates and students possible selves (Author, 2007). The thoughts of Carmen reinforce this conclusion. When describing her personal evolution, Carmen’s cultural affiliation was initially undefined; she did not identify herself with one specific culture. After the semester, however, Carmen was able to underline two significant characteristics of her cultural make up, White and Hispanic. We believe the activities implemented during the semester helped her find a place within the societal interlace. Most importantly, we feel it is important for candidates to understand their personal cultural definition as it may differ from that of students and parents. Without this understanding, the incongruence may lead to a parallel counseling relationship as opposed to a reciprocal cultural dance (Sue & Sue, 2003).

Counselors must be able to recognize students’ cultural backgrounds in order to establish positive working associations (Ridley, 2005). The realizations of one of the candidates, Eva, support Ridley’s comments as her responses describe an increase in her ability to embrace others’ experiences by applying her empathic skills. Empathy allows counselors to see students’ worlds through their own eyes, it is considered the most important ingredient in establishing a working relationship.

Socialization influences the manner in which views are expressed. Communication between counselors and students must follow a framework of genuineness, openness, and honesty. Therefore, to accurately interact with students, counselor candidates need to evaluate how they unintentionally communicate their personal views to students and others as well as the impact of these views on them (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2009). The following candidate’s account demonstrates the importance of counselors recognizing and honoring individual perceptions in order to create stable working relationships with students. Sofia’s words illustrate her reflections of the negative connotations her culture imposed upon others. She wrote, “I live in a diverse neighborhood ... I always have ... my neighbors are my friends. I try to find out more about their culture so that I can be more mindful of how I act”. We find this is essential to be aware of as again it may interfere in the general scope of the counseling relationship. Further, Sofia learned to value her cultural background and use it as vehicle to being more understanding towards others. Unless counselors are able to examine their personal agendas and take a meticulous look at themselves they are likely to inhibit students’ cultural experiences (Sue, 2001).

### **Developing Effective, Inclusive Counseling Practices**

The culminating process in the course sought to encourage candidates to engage in unpacking one more indispensable layer in the counseling process: a dimension in the therapeutic course of action which seeks to develop effective comprehensive counseling practices by looking at the internal and external sociocultural assets of students and parents (Corey, 2009). Today, guidance services have transcended from the traditional universal training to a specific cross-cultural approach considering the multiple norms and expectations of diverse pupils in schools (Carter, 2005). Developing appropriate interventions, effective pedagogical counseling practices and educational roadmaps require counselor candidates to use students' strengths, and also understand the relevance of their cultural roles. The following accounts portray the importance of incorporating culturally germane information into the counseling process between counselors and students and how having cultural advocates helps students gain the awareness to funnel their educational selves and prospects within a societal context.

Being an advocate for students is one of the many roles school counseling candidates will play in the educational culture. In answering the survey question, "how do you see your role as a school practitioner?" at the beginning of the semester, Perla wrote "a positive influence that can or will try to help other people however I can". Later in the semester, Perla wrote, "to be an advocate for students and be someone they feel safe and comfortable to talk with". Through the journey of self-exploration she expanded her advocacy skills, which will assist her in supporting her prospective students.

Deconstructing the weight that sociocultural factors have in the educational aspirations of students is valuable as it may help counselors set culturally relevant goals for students. Soledad, one of the candidates, shared, "it is important to avoid generalizations based on ethnic background. Go beyond personal biases" (Soledad, personal communication, December 20, 2009). This is essential in working with diverse groups of students as counselors' personal views may prevent them from engaging in educationally lucrative working relationships with their counselees (Banks & Banks, 2010). Analyzing the multiple roads traveled by students serves counselors as a means to develop effective interventions to help students achieve their dreams.

In the beginning of the semester, another candidate, Candela, wrote that, "taking the time to read, write and listen to cultures is one way to learn more about students." At the end of the term, she reflected that she "experienced and lived other cultures by finding the commonalities between [her] past and [her] students' cultural backgrounds" (Candela, personal communication, December 20, 2009). At the beginning of the semester, Coral defined herself as "an African American who cannot be hidden" (Coral, personal communication, September 9, 2009) because of her color. Later in the semester, she was able to expand her own view; when explaining the meaning of African American, she wrote "We came here as slaves ... we have no idea where we came from but it is assumed we came from Africa". Coral's description of color at the beginning of the semester turned into a geographical analysis of her identity, which will help her when analyzing the journey her students and their ancestors experienced when coming to this country.

The interpersonal nature of the deconstructive dialogue utilized in the course led Soledad, Candela, and Coral to unpack the sociocultural funds individuals possess. Carefully observing, contextualizing and reflecting, assessing, and analyzing the views of candidates in the course achieved this process of unpacking. Candidates actively participated in conversations, which led to a deepened appreciation of the linguistic and cultural richness students bring to school.

Facilitating the practice whereby students learn to define their cultural footprints is a process much needed in guidance services. Rita at first explained the need for all students to "be

part of something bigger called society" (Rita, personal communication, September 9, 2009). She also said "this sometimes might be uncomfortable" (Rita, personal communication, September 9, 2009). However, towards the end of the semester she said, "in order to be part of this broader context it is important for the students to realize their place in society", and added that she would "facilitate the process of students understanding their trajectories" (Rita, personal communication, December 20, 2009). One of the goals of counseling students is to connect with them at just such a genuine level. Developing effective and inclusive counseling practices like Rita's allows all participants in the counseling process to appreciate, honor, and develop their own cultural gifts.

## Discussion

At the dawn of the 21st century, counseling is facing socio-cultural challenges that will affect the future of countless students all over the world. Populations, cultures, and languages once homogeneous have now become heterogeneous due to the constant movement of humans across geographical borders. Thus, transformative counselors looking for effective ways to meet the needs of culturally diverse students enrolled in compulsory educational settings must embrace the students' cultural richness and utilize the latter as an asset to create effective practices. As analyzed in this project, gaining personal cultural awareness of one's attitudes through self-reflection can positively impact candidates' working relationships with parents and students. The awareness developed by candidates is a product of a three step learning process. First, counselors analyze their own self and correlate this with the selves of students and parents. Secondly, they contextualize both selves within society, realizing that thoughts, ideas, and actions occur in different social settings that validate or refuse to validate them. Finally, counselors apply what they learned in the first two steps to create effective practices that will have a positive impact on the schooling of students. These three steps develop awareness that counselors, students, and parents will carry beyond the educational settings. Thus, counseling becomes the platform to construct possible selves that will transform not only the participants but also their social environments (i.e., family, school, community, society).

The outcomes of this project showed that effective school counseling goes beyond transmitting ideas to students and parents about how to successfully carry on through the K-12 journey. When counselors and counselees exchange thoughts through their dialogues, personal experiences, and individual backgrounds, culture, and language are on the table. Perhaps these factors are filtered, on the counselor side, to provide a professional, objective support to students and parents. And maybe, counselees avoid sharing their views about the society that surrounds them because they perceive the counselor as the "other." If this is the case, counseling lacks the much needed humanistic component of this educational relationship that was created to unify and enhance efforts between the parties participating in the learning process. Effective counseling should develop the idea of "we" composed by the cultural, linguistic uniqueness and richness of counselors and counselees.

The study described here was developed under the assumption that in order to create the aforesaid "we", counselors must first build a personal awareness of their own views to better understand the circumstances that affect the behavior, emotions, and relationships of their counselees. Through the semester, counselor candidates "dove" into their inner selves to deconstruct and construct their cultural identities. By doing that, they "rescued" aspects that were

forgotten but that are key to achieving the counseling standards set by the American School Counselor Association for student academic, career, and personal/social development. These standards outline the knowledge, attitudes, and skills students should obtain as a result of engaging in effective learning relationships in schools by way of comprehensive guidance programs and an inclusive and positive school ethos.

The lessons learned in the implementation of this model can help counselor educators in counseling programs enhance their current teaching practices by incorporating varied experiential activities that will allow candidates the opportunity to walk through an introspective process. It is through this introspection that they can examine their cultural predispositions and how these may impact their counselor practices.

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